

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 453 500

CG 030 996

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TITLE Screening for Pervasive Intolerance in Admissions
 Candidates.
PUB DATE 1999-04-00
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the
 American Counseling Association (San Diego, CA, April 13-17,
 1999).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Admission Criteria; *Bias; *Counseling; *Counselor
 Training; Graduate Students; Higher Education; Models;
 *Racial Attitudes; Screening Tests; Student Attitudes;
 *Workshops

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the Pre-Admission Workshop, which is designed as a screening procedure to achieve optimal selection outcomes for graduate study in counseling. The workshop not only assesses the academic potential of the applicants, but also allows for observation of multicultural competencies developed by Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992). It gives counselor educators the opportunity to address an applicant's ideology that may be racist and unamenable to remediation. The rationale for the admissions screening model is that stronger attention should be given to malignant personality characteristics that are resistant to change and would call for the interventions that go beyond the scope of the graduate preparation programs. The workshop approach to graduate admissions is experimentally based and is intended to supplement the traditional measures used to select candidates for degrees in counseling. Sample questions and criteria for evaluation are included. Preliminary qualitative results of the pilot workshop suggest that the experience is beneficial, positive, and an excellent introduction to the counseling program. (JDM)

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Screening for Pervasive Intolerance in Admissions Candidates

Paper presented at the American Counseling Association

1999 World Conference

San Diego, California

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Abstract

This paper introduces a working model for screening procedures to identify those ingrained, pervasive, and destructive belief systems that make applicants for graduate preparation at-risk for futures as counselors in a multicultural society. This Pre Admission Workshop approach to graduate admissions is experientially based and is intended to complement the traditional measures used to select candidates for degrees in counseling. Sample questions and criteria for evaluation are provided.

The Pre Admission Workshop is an experientially based screening procedure designed to achieve optimal selection outcomes for graduate study in counseling. This workshop not only assesses the academic potential of applicants, but is also designed to allow for observation of multicultural sensitivity and understanding. This model was inspired by the document on multicultural competencies developed by Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992). The Pre Admission Workshop is intended to empower counselor educators to address the uncomfortable implications of a closer scrutiny of inert racist ideology and identify, screen, and reject those candidates who demonstrate attitudes and behaviors which are unamenable to remediation. The rationale for the Pre Admission Workshop model is that stronger consideration should be given to malignant personality characteristics that are resistant to change and would call for the kinds of psychodynamic and intrusive interventions which would be beyond the scope of graduate preparation programs.

The following discussion will describe the procedures of the Pre Admission Workshop which is approximately five hours in length.

The Pre Admission Workshop

8:00-8:30 Orientation

The chair of the department welcomes the applicants and shows a multimedia presentation about the department. After the welcome and multimedia presentation, the applicants take a tour of the clinical facilities of the department.

8:30-9:00 Writing Sample

The applicants are asked to write a 300 word minimum sample essay on one of the following suggested topics:

1. Why are you choosing counseling as a career field?
2. Discuss what multiculturalism means to you.
3. Describe a significant childhood memory and how it has influenced you.
4. Discuss a person who has impacted your life significantly.
5. Describe a time in your life when you were with a person or group of a different culture or race. Explain what you learned from your experience.

9:00-9:15 Break

9:15-9:45 Advising Groups

The applicants meet in small groups according to proposed concentration in counseling (e.g., community, school, marriage and family) with a faculty member. The following areas are introduced, explained, and discussed: (a) program description and courses, (b) scheduling, (c) advising procedures, (d) policies, (e) practicum and internships, (f) comprehensive examination, (g) requirements for state licensure. It is also during this time the applicant may choose to change program concentration, or to pursue other options for graduate study.

9:45-10:45 Introductions

The applicants are assigned to a new small group (approximately 8-10 people, not assigned by program concentration) for the remainder of the time. A minimum of two faculty members are assigned to each group (adjuncts, field supervisors, and alumni may also be invited to interview the applicants).

The faculty asks each applicant to "introduce yourself as your best friend would." The faculty observes the group participation.

10:15-11:15 Group Interview

The faculty asks questions of each applicant. Sample questions include:

1. Describe the influences which led you to apply to the program.
2. What have you learned about your own cultural heritage?
3. Your sister tells you she is considering marrying a person with two biracial children. What would be your reaction? Explain.
4. Describe a typical week in the life of a counselor (If the role perception is narrow or erroneous, follow-up questions are asked about parts of the profession that were omitted or distorted).
5. During a counseling session, a same sex client discloses that he or she is sexually attracted to you. What do you do?
6. How would you describe your personal strengths?
7. What areas of self improvement are you focusing on at this time? (Applicants who appear to have affective deficiencies tend to want to focus on professional traits).
8. What traditions have you come to appreciate about a cultural group other than your own?
9. As a counselor, what steps would you take to prepare yourself for working with clients of a different culture?

10. In your association with others of a different ethnic, cultural, or religious background, what have you learned about yourself?

11. What do you see yourself doing ten years from now? (If different from field of study, how does this program fit into that goal?).

The faculty observes responses and group participation.

11:15-11:30 Break

11:30- 12:30 Group Task

The group task focuses on interpersonal and interactional skills, sensitivity and understanding of diversity, and consensus-seeking abilities. The faculty provides each applicant with 10 pictures. Each applicant is asked to assign meaning to each and then to rank order the pictures (1 = most important). Next, the faculty asks the applicants to assign meaning and rank order the pictures (one applicant can serve as recorder) by consensus. The faculty observes interpersonal skills and group interaction (e.g., listening, appropriate self-disclosure, feedback) during the consensus-seeking period. After completing the consensus-seeking task, the applicants are asked, "What did you learn about yourself during this activity?"

The pictures designed for the group task were adapted from pictures used by another counseling program. The original pictures were in black and white caricatures and represented broad themes such as patriotism, love, religion, education, family, brotherhood, freedom and justice, winning, and money. The pictures designed for the Pre Admission Workshop were in color and represented diversity. For instance, the family concept was presented as a multiracial family. Another example portrays a first-place trophy with an individual in a wheelchair superimposed. A final example involves the depiction of a silhouette and the initials of organizations such as NOW, NAACP, KKK, ACLU. Surrounding the picture is the phrase "with freedom and justice for all."

12:30-12:45 Video

The applicants view a 7-10 minute video and are asked to discuss their reactions. The faculty observes the responses and group participation. The video was developed by a group of students in the counseling program as a requirement for a class. The video highlights how Americans use spirituality to understand and cope with tragedies. The video depicts multicultural forms of spiritual expression.

12:45-1:00 Closure. Positive Feedback Loop

The faculty asks each applicant to provide one positive feedback statement to each applicant in the group. The faculty observes the process.

Criteria for Evaluation of Student Performance

The following criteria are used for consideration of admission to the counseling program.

1. The faculty rates each applicant on a 1-5 Likert rating scale (5 = highest rating). This rating is based on admission data (e.g., grade point average, Graduate Record Examination or the Miller's Analogy Test, three reference forms), the group interview, and the writing sample. A minimum rating of 3 on each of the variables is needed for unconditional admission.
2. The faculty uses the following criteria to determine the applicant's performance during the group interview:
 - a. Affect and poise
 - b. Interpersonal skills
 - c. Apparent commitment to the field
 - d. Knowledge of professional role
 - e. Appropriate motivation toward the role
 - f. Realistic appraisal of personal strengths and weaknesses
 - g. Group participation and interaction
 - h. Self-awareness of cultural values, cultural sensitivity and understanding of diversity.
3. Criteria used for screening include:
 - a. Refusal to participate.
 - b. Disregard for others (e.g., persistent denial of differing world views or excessive sense of entitlement).
 - c. Lacking empathy (e.g., poor listening skills--especially of differing viewpoints and feelings).
 - d. Grandiose sense of self importance (e.g., superior without achievements, while demeaning others).
 - e. Dogmatic "all-or-nothing" commentary.
 - f. Pervasive distrust without sufficient basis that another group is harmful.

- g. Limited expression (e.g., compulsively intellectualizing as a defense mechanism for attitudes of superiority).
 - h. Over-biased commentary (rigidly holding extreme beliefs about another group on the basis of a single incident and applying it inappropriately to dissimilar events or settings).
4. The writing sample is rated on organization, mechanics, vocabulary, and content.

Conclusion

Preliminary qualitative results of the piloting of the Pre Admission Workshop suggests that the experience is beneficial, positive, and an excellent introduction to the counseling program. Students were asked which questions were most useful to cultural sensitivity screening. The three most useful questions identified were: (a) "Your sister tells you she is considering marrying a person with two biracial children. What would be your reaction? Explain", (b) "On what areas of self improvement are you focusing on at this time?", and (c) "During a counseling session, a same sex client discloses that he or she is sexually attracted to you. What do you do?" In the consensus-seeking exercise which involved the use of pictures, the image that stated "with freedom and justice for all," was considered the most useful for cultural sensitivity screening. Finally, the writing sample questions that were considered the most useful to cultural sensitivity training were "Discuss what multiculturalism means to you", and "Describe a time in your life when you were with a person or group of a different culture or race. Explain what you learned from your experience."

The Pre Admission Workshop model was designed to screen applicants for cultural insensitivity that is beyond the capabilities of a graduate program to provide appropriate remediation. A secondary gain of the model has been the positive learning experiences all participants receive as a result of participating in the workshop. Most importantly, the workshop communicates the value that preparing counselors to be culturally competent is a primary goal. More models need to be developed and shared with the profession that demonstrates how to endorse the importance of preparing counselors to work in an increasingly more culturally diverse society, nationally and internationally.

References

Sue, D. W., Arredondo, P., & McDavis. (1992). Multicultural competencies and standards: A call to the profession. Journal of Counseling and Development, 70, 477-486.



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San Diego, California

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